

Third Place Winner
Division I – 7-9th Grades
Chainging the World
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In 2011, disaster struck Fukushima, Japan. The 30-ft waves that slammed into Fukushima after a 9.1 magnitude earthquake devastated not only Fukushima but what was in the city, too. These huge waves happened to hit the Daiichi nuclear power plant, causing massive explosions. The result was abominable. The situation that occurred was so bad that it was categorized as a level seven major accident on the International Nuclear Event Scale (I.N.E.S). There was a level-7 meltdown that was spewing radiation, and it needed to be fixed.

In the midst of a disaster there is often a hero, and this time that hero was Yasuteru Yamada. He really is the definition of moral courage. In the aftermath of this unfortunate event, he rose up to face the danger. When the Daiichi meltdown occurred and he saw what happened, he felt that it vitally needed to be changed. He realized that he was old and that even if he lived the average lifespan, he would only live another 10-20 years. So, bravely, he collected other men like him, old engineer veterans and other pensioners all over the age of 60. These brave men and women decided that they, the older generation, should be the ones to fight the meltdown, not the young. He decided that himself and the others would take the risk to help clean up the meltdown of Fukushima. “Even if I was exposed to the radiation, the cancer would take at least 20-30 years to react,” said Yasuteru Yamada valiantly. So he began to collect people, and they ended up naming their group “The Skilled Veterans Group”. With their group set up, they were ready to take on the challenges of cleaning up.

Mr. Yamada and his group express great moral courage in every way. They realized that if younger men and women went to clean up this mess, they would most likely get cancer and have great hardships ahead in their life. But they realized they were old and still wanted to help no matter what. They volunteered and practically gave up their lives to help this problem that is not just Japan’s problem but the world’s too. Even though we were not there we should have all been rushing to help. They could have easily stayed home and wait the problem out, but they felt the urge to lend aid. They wanted to use their skills for the better. This is a great example of going against the tide. They, who acknowledge that they were getting old decided to do the unthinkable. They saw that was the right thing to help with this situation. To me, that is really just breathtaking. I can’t express how much gratitude I feel for them. To risk your life for the better of all is just an amazing thing to do that takes a lot of physical courage as well. This man should be known around the world for his great moral and physical courage.

When I look at this man I instantly think “Wow,” This man is willing to sacrifice his own life to save younger people. He really is a modern day superhero. He was willing to risk something dear to save people and a problem. He also really reminds me of the Holocaust heroes. Ready to risk and give up so much, all for the good of the world. Natural disasters really are human rights issues, just like the Holocaust. Natural disasters can harm humans and cause major issues with the people around when the disaster happens.

When I ask myself “Could I do that?” I really do wonder. I begin to think and think. I know I won’t be able to save thousands of people or even clean up a nuclear disaster, but I can do simple things. Ever since I read this great story, I strive to be like Yasuteru Yamada. I want to choose to do the right thing even when I could be at home watching TV or slacking off being lazy. When I think of this story it emboldens me to try something new to cause *good* change in society. And it really can be something simple. Maybe my friend is having trouble learning a subject. I can approach that person and try to help them. I can pick up trash or share a simple smile, these can be a huge thing for those around me. I can even sacrifice money or time to volunteer for something, because in the long run that stuff really doesn't matter. It’s what we do to change the world for the better that matters.

One day I was having a rough class period when I went into my school hallway. My great friend Jake saw me and said “Man bro you really are a great friend!” He smiled at me. Instantly I felt better more energized, and I wanted to do the same thing to someone else. Then if I do this to someone else they will want to do it too... On and on it will go helping and inspiring a lot of people. Yasuteru Yamada really has changed in me what I do and what I think. I really hope others soon learn about him and what he is doing in our wonderful world.

Works Cited

- Buerk, Roland. “Japan pensioners volunteer to tackle nuclear crisis.”BBC News,31 May, 2011.
- Belson, Ken. “Elders Offer Help at Japan’s Crippled Reactor.”The New York Times, 27 June, 2011.